



## Tabletop Session Summary

August 12, 2021

### After Action Reviews - Identifying Lessons Learned from Summer Learning Programs to Accelerate Learning

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**Presenters:** Allison Layland and Julie Corbett, [National Comprehensive Center](#); Norwalk Public Schools Staff and Partners; [Norwalk Public Schools](#)

This tabletop discussion examined components of an After Action Review of a summer learning program and explored how to use that process to improve future programming.

### Session Highlights

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- » Norwalk Public Schools in Connecticut serves 11,700 students in 21 schools with 1,900 staff members.
- » Norwalk's K-8 Summer Academy included programming from the Maritime Aquarium and the Mystic Seaport Museum. The programming by the Maritime Aquarium was focused on students in grades K-3, while the Mystic Seaport Museum was focused on students in grades 4-8. Students went on weekly fieldtrips, collected scientific data, and participated in coastal exploration activities at a local beach.
- » After Action Reviews provide an opportunity for teams to reflect on recent events and to identify lessons learned to improve future performance.
- » There are four steps involved with an After Action Review including planning for the review, conducting the review, following-up on recommendations, and applying lessons learned.
- » Using Norwalk as an example, there are several questions to consider in reflection on summer programming. There are questions around the decision-making process that was utilized, how equity was considered, how partnerships were formed, and what outcomes were achieved. Additionally, it is important to reflect on what worked well and what could have been done better.
- » Other important considerations when conducting these reviews include understanding that the process requires participants to be present and committed, and actions before and after reflection are just as vital as the reflection itself. It's also critical to recognize that the process is meant to be part of a cycle of continuous improvement throughout an entire organization.

### Shared Resources

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- » [After Action Review for Learning Recovery](#)
- » [After Action Review for Summer Learning Programs](#)
- » [After Action Review Guide](#)



## Questions and Answers on After Action Reviews - Identifying Lessons Learned from Summer Learning Programs to Accelerate Learning

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### **How were decisions made for the K-8 Summer Academy? How were priorities identified and programs selected?**

The K-8 Summer Academy is a product of the Superintendent's vision. However, all departments were involved in decision-making, from finance, specialized learning, curriculum and instruction, and others to ensure all students were being served. Given the COVID pandemic, students spent last school year tethered to a computer screen for virtual learning. The district wanted to develop a summer experiential program where students could detach from the computer and have enrichment experiences that they were not allowed to have in the previous school year.

In terms of priorities, Connecticut's state policy for districts with K-3 students with substantial deficits in reading requires that the students receive support to prepare them for the next school year. Assessment data is used to identify schools in the substantially deficient range in reading. Over the past few years, the policy was updated to include other grade levels and continues to be scaled to include other subjects (i.e., math, social studies, and science).

### **What considerations were given to equity?**

District data showed that Hispanic students comprised approximately 68 percent of enrollment. Half of the enrolled students were multilingual learners, 55 percent were students who qualified for free or reduced priced lunch, and 27 percent were students with disabilities. Given the inequities exacerbated by the pandemic, the district wanted to plan for the "summer of all summers" with a robust program that addressed the whole child.

The idea was to bring students into the real world to gain experiences that they could bring back to the classroom and engage in projects, experiments, and hands-on opportunities to strengthen learning. In addition to partnerships with the Maritime Aquarium and the Mystic Seaport Museum, they had a partnership with the Norwalk Public Library to bring books to students that they could check out with just their school identification number. They relied on art and music teachers to provide specials.

### **How were partners identified and selected?**

The Maritime Aquarium is a historical site and is a huge part of the city of Norwalk. It has existing relationships with many schools. The district felt that this was a great time to strengthen the partnership. The district had a great partnership with the Mystic Seaport Museum as well. It met weekly with partners. Planning discussions started early in the spring and allowed partners time to prepare and to put the right staff in place. Both partners were flexible and provided an experience customized with the district's vision.

### **How impactful was the K-8 Summer Academy on student learning? Were expected outcomes achieved? How do you know?**

Since the Summer Academy recently ended, school and district staff have been busy organizing the data in order to analyze it. The district will look at pre- and post-assessment data. The pre- and post-assessments were administered the first and last week to capture comparable data. The district's intention is also to compare data at the end of last school year to measures in August. Attendance data will be important to analyze as well. In the interim, Maritime Aquarium staff and the core literacy program staff are working to gather feedback from the programs.



**In terms of the After Action Review, are you already getting a sense of how these processes benefit the district? What are some things that you are already starting to learn?**

Some of the quantitative data is still being analyzed, but the qualitative pieces that the district collected from principals and teachers relative to impact show that the students were more engaged this summer. Many felt that this was “real school” and were not participating in a program that was penalizing them in any way. Many teachers and principals have shared specific examples of students who felt as though they couldn’t miss out on the school day because there were a lot of things happening. One principal spoke of a first grader who was hesitant to attend the summer program, but after hearing the students were going to visit Mystic Seaport, the student didn’t have trouble attending. The district also received calls from parents asking how to enroll children in the program. The district had to explain that enrollment was not elective, rather students had to be selected.

